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AUTHOR Geiger, John
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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to describe the procedures and results of a board of education using a community committee in the selection of a new superintendent. The use of a committee in this role is unusual, given the board's legal responsibility and the significance of the task. An analysis of the procedures and results indicates that the committee's ratings of applicants was not significantly different from that of the board and that traditional criteria weighed heavily in the selection. They also indicate that there were definite benefits in terms of legitimatizing the selection and generating support for the board in the community. (Author)

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Prepared by:

John Geiger
School of Education
University of Dayton
Dayton, Ohio 45469

A COMMUNITY COMMITTEE HELPS TO SELECT THE SUPERINTENDENT: A CASE STUDY

A school board has the legal responsibility of hiring a superintendent. It is one of the most important tasks it ever undertakes. Probably because of these facts, traditionally boards have tended not to involve citizens' committees directly in the selection process.

However, the changing nature of the superintendency and the heightened awareness of some board members and community representatives about the politics of education will probably contribute to increased demand for direct input from the public in the process. The objectives of this paper are the following:

a. To describe a case in which a board used a community committee to help select a superintendent.

b. To describe the procedures employed in the selection process, noting particularly how these procedures evolved because of the use of the community committee.

c. To assess the results of the process by analyzing the ranking and voting patterns of board members and community representatives on the various applicants for the superintendency.

d. To present the outlines of a model for the use of a community committee in the selection of a superintendent.

I. Perspective

The superintendent of a multi-racial, multi-economic city school district of approximately 5,000 students retired after thirteen years

at the position. The announcement of his retirement came at a time when a levy was before the voters for the ninth time. Some citizens had laid the blame for the levy's eight defeats at the feet of the superintendent. The district was in the midst of debate over open-spaced schools. A citizen's group had collected hundreds of signatures calling for an outside evaluation of the open-spaced classrooms. Board members and citizens had stated that the quality of education at two of the elementary schools was significantly inferior to that at the other schools. There had been incidents in the schools which the press had characterized as racial disturbances. The teachers and the board had been unable to reach agreement on a contract and were still negotiating.

The school board consisted of four men and one woman. The men tended to classify the woman as a dissident. The woman did not accept the title but it was well known in the district that she frequently stood alone on various issues before the board. For instance, she openly stated her opposition to the levy and had been directly involved in the controversy over the open-spaced schools. Furthermore, she characterized herself as representing a constituency different (i.e. poor and minority) from the other board members. She seemed to perceive her function as one of representing her constituency rather than the school system and maintaining an open school board.

Given this complex and potentially volatile environment, the board decided to form a community committee to assist it in the selection of a new superintendent. The motives for establishing

the committee probably, then, were mixed depending on the board member. In addition to the motive of selecting a qualified replacement, they probably also related to generating support for the levy, the board and the system as a whole. Thus, although the initial suggestion for a community committee came from the so-called "dissident", the other board members supported the suggestion quite readily.

A ten member community committee was established. It consisted of two teachers selected by the association, an administrator selected by the principals, a high school student selected by the student government, a classified person selected by the classified staff, and five representatives of the community-at-large--one each to be nominated by each board member and approved by the whole board. While the composition of the committee was readily agreed to, its specific role was not settled as smoothly. In fact, specific elements of its role were established only after it had been functioning with the Board for several weeks. Initially, however, the board settled two disputed points about the committee's functioning. First, it agreed that because it had the legal responsibility for the superintendent's selection, the community committee would not be involved in the final selection. Rather, the community committee working with the board as a single committee would recommend at least three candidates to the board. Secondly, after a public meeting at which citizens would be invited to make suggestions about criteria, the board and community committee would establish the criteria. This decision was agreed to rather than an initial suggestion that

the district be randomly sampled about its criteria.

II. Procedures

The ten member community committee and the board met as a fifteen member committee with three consultants from the local university. The consultants led the discussion, explaining the procedures which the board and the consultants had previously agreed to. They were the following:

1. After a public meeting on criteria, the board and committee would establish the criteria.
2. The consultants would conduct a review to screen out applicants on the basis of minimum criteria and present their findings to the board and committee.
3. Prior to this time no one other than the consultants would have access to the applications.
4. If a majority of the board and committee voted to overrule the decision of the consultants on any applicant, that application would be included in those which would be reviewed and rated by the board and committee.
5. The board and committee would have access to all the applications <u>after</u> the initial screening.
6. The remaining applications would be reviewed and rated by the board and committee on the basis of the criteria.
7. The board and committee would select eight to twelve applicants for interviews.
8. From these interviews about three to five applicants would be selected for final interviewing by the board.

9. The Board would make the final selection.
10. If appropriate, members of the committee and board would drive into an applicant's district to make informal inquiries or make telephone calls to people residing in the district.
11. The board would reserve the right to request final applicants fill out "tests" to assess various management skills and attitudes.

Several questions were raised by committee and board members relative to these procedures. Two of them were directed at the consultants. The first was what were the "minimum criteria" the consultants would use in their initial screening. The consultant's response was that only those who were obviously not qualified would be screened out, that any member of the committee and board would have access to all the applications after initial screening, and that they (the consultants) were not "head hunters". The second question to the consultants was why could not any committee and board member who so chose review the applications before the initial screening. One committee member even suggested that all applications should be reviewed and rated by each committee and board member. The consultants responded that this would too time consuming. They agreed to present a report on each of the applicants whom they had screened out. These responses were not completely satisfactory to everyone but were accepted temporarily. Several committee members indicated they would take a "wait and see" attitude.

The third question related to procedure eight which said the board and committee would select eight to twelve applicants for

interview. Was this selection to be done by majority vote or some type of consensus? The president of the board seemed to opt for consensus. Several committee and board members leaned toward majority rule. This issue also was left unresolved.

These three procedural issues were probably best left unresolved at the initial stages of the process. Probably, they could be resolved amicably only after the board and committee members had actually begun the process of reviewing and rating applications. The board and committee needed to see how the process worked before reaching a final decision on these issues. Secondly, these issues are directly related to the question of trust. It was not until the consultants, committee and board had worked together that they could be resolved to the satisfaction of everyone.

III. Meetings

Working together meant meeting. The consultants, board and committee met with the public in a two hour meeting to establish criteria. The "public" consisted of about half a dozen citizens and two representatives of the teachers' association. The thrust of the recommended criteria was that the superintendent should be a dynamic educational leader who would pull the community together and generate support for the schools. Each constituent expressed his or her own interest. The student on the committee wanted a visible superintendent who would listen to the students. The teacher representative wanted a superintendent who would "back up the teachers." The administrator wanted a team management type. Others--some parents--talked about discipline and the basics.[1]

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[1]See Appendix A for the final agreed to criteria.

Trust and a certain esprit de corps developed as board, committee and consultants met on five days for approximately twenty hours during which time the board and committee members individually read and rated each application on the basis of the criteria.[2] It was during this time, especially among those who most consistently met, that the distinction between board and committee became less pronounced. Board, committee and consultants informally discussed the quality of the candidates, the procedures, the hours of work involved, the nature of the district and other ideas. Those who reviewed and rated the applications the most expressed a sense of achievement. They seemed to band together, whether board or committee member.

Following this tedious process, a meeting of the board, committee and consultants was held. The consultants presented the results of the ratings and the top ten applicants in rank order. It was agreed without any objection that the top eight applicants be contacted for interviewing. Interestingly, the question of majority vote vs. consensus which had been an earlier concern was not even raised.

The so-called "dissident" board member did raise the question of reviewing all the applications subsequent to the consultants' presentation of reasons why other applications had been screened out. She took the option of reviewing all the applications and actually did present one which the consultants had screened out to the board and committee for vote. The vast majority of the board and committee voted against reviewing this application.

The interviews were conducted over a series of evening and

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[2]See Appendix B for the rating scale.

one Saturday meeting. They consisted of one half hour for the applicant to respond to five open-ended questions developed by the committee, a half hour for committee and board members to ask questions and thirty minutes for open-ended discussion between the committee, the board and the candidate. The new relationship between board, committee and consultants seemed evident in the fact that people openly expressed their characterizations and feelings about the applicants. (One female committee member said she was torn between one applicant who looked like Wally Cox and another who looked like Robert Redford. Her heart told her Redford but her brain said Wally Cox.) They also began to verbalize their satisfaction with the procedures to the consultants and themselves, often citing the quality of the applicants as proof of the value of the procedures.

The final meeting of the board, committee and consultants resulted in the selection of the three top applicants (and one alternate) who would be recommended to the board for final interview and selection. The procedure used was agreed to at the beginning of the meeting:

1. Each committee and board member verbally indicated which three applicants he or she recommended for final interviewing and selection.
2. Each committee and board member in turn discussed briefly the perceived strengths and weaknesses of each of the eight applicants.
3. A final vote was taken to decide the three applicants and an alternate that would be recommended to the board.

This second step in the procedure proved reflective of the openness among board and committee members. For one thing, the board and committee members openly expressed their feelings about the applicants and, to a greater extent than previously, supported each others' feelings. The step proved useful since when the vote was taken in the third step several committee and board members changed their initial vote, citing points raised in the discussion.

This last meeting of the board, committee and consultants concluded with expressions of thanks to everyone and confidence that which ever of the applicants was chosen the procedures had qualitatively increased the chances that the most qualified applicant would be chosen.

IV. Results

Was this expression of confidence correct or not? The results indicate that from two perspectives it may not have been. Rank order correlation was used to compare the rating of the committee and the board on all of the applications. The value of r_s was .76 (significant at .01 level) indicating that it is highly likely that the same eight applicants would have been chosen for interviewing if the board had chosen applicants without the committee. Since not all applications were read and rated by each committee and board member, a second rank order correlation was used taking only those applications which were read and rated by the same three board members and the same five committee members. The r_s in this case was also .76, significant at .05 level. Finally in comparing the combined board and committee's top ten choices, the top seven choices appeared on the board and

committee's separate ranking. But, it should also be noted that since the ratings of the applications were carried on by people who were in communication with each other it is impossible to say that the ratings of the committee were not influenced by the board and vice-versa. Furthermore, it should be remembered that board members personally selected five of the members of the committee.

Secondly, although the criteria established by the committee and board had an emphasis on potential applicants' previous experience in community's similar to its own, the applicants who received the highest everall ratings were not necessarily those who had such experience. Other "more traditional" and obvious criteria tended to be important. For instance, all but two of the candidates had Ph.D. or Ed.D. degrees. All had extensive experience (6 to 20 years) as superintendents. The applicant who finally got the job had no recent and little previous expreience in a multi-ethnic, multi-economic district.

Looking at the results from another perspective, the use of the committee appears to have had salutory effects. Based on verbal interaction and comments made by board and committee members, the process contributed to the legitimacy of the selection, enhanced the potential effectiveness of the newly-selected superintendent to deal with the district's problems, created a meaningful cohesion between

committee and board members, and enhanced the relationship among board members. For instance, in reference to the latter point, board members made more remarks that involved risk-taking and support (even of the "dissident" member) toward the end of the process then they did in the beginning. Two board members, who had been opposed to the "dissident" several times initially, publically expressed their appreciation for her idea to form a community committee. The new superintendent emphasized in the press conference called to announce his appointment that the use of the community committee in his selection would enhance his chances of success in his new position.

Finally, the results indicate that:

1. Several members of the committee did not take advantage of the opportunity to participate in one phase or another.
2. The student rated only three candidates, giving a particularly high rating to a person she knew (the candidate received the second lowest ranking by the committee and board combined). She did not participate thereafter.
3. One of the teachers who had initially expressed the idea that too many teachers did not care enough about the selection, did not participate much beyond the first meeting when selection criteria were established.
4. The "dissident" board member rated a half dozen applications but did not turn them in for computation with the other ratings.
5. The board as a group tended to rate applications higher than the community committee.

V. Significance

Given the changing nature of the superintendency and increased political awareness of boards of education and community in the schools, the selection of a new superintendent will probably come to involve more and more the use of community committees in the selection process. Using this case study, a tentative model has been developed which highlights procedures (those which may need to be determined and those which may need to evolve) and potential results.

APPENDIX A

CRITERIA FOR SUPERINTENDENT

Experience

* 1. The person must have had successful public educational administrative experience in a multi-racial, multi-ethnic district.

* 2. The person must have had successful experience as a public school administrator in developing human, community and public relations.

3. The person must have had successful experience as a public school administrator in budgeting, management and curriculum development.

4. The person must have had successful experience as an educational leader who has been able to unify teachers, staff administrative staff and students for the purpose of equal quality education.

Education

1. The person must po ess a City Superintendent's Certificate.

2. The person must posess the minimum of a Masters degree.

Specific Strengths

* 1. The person must be a sensitive, open, dependable person who has a strong community orientation.

2. The person must be a dynamic educational leader who can bring diverse ideas and philosophies together in a

meaningful fashion.

3. The person's philosophy of education must be in keeping with the philosophy of

Major Accomplishments

1. The person should be someone who views his major accomplishments in educational administration as involving:
   a. Uniting a community.
   b. The development of equal quality education.
   c. Financial/budgeting management.
   d. Curriculum development.

APPENDIX B

APPLICANT NUMBER_____ RATING: A _____ (80)

B _____ (30)

C _____ (40)

TOTAL RATING: _____(150)

RATING SCALE FOR SUPERINTENDENT APPLICATIONS

For each application reviewed, circle the number which most nearly rates each of the criteria according to your feeling about it. A high rating shows considerable evidence of this criteria and your satisfaction with it; a low rating shows little or no evidence and low satisfaction. It is important that you mark each item; an item not marked will be counted as a zero.

Category A

* 1. Shows successful administrative experience in multi-racial, multi-ethnic and varied socio-economic community.

Low					Average					High
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

* 2. Shows experience in developing human, community and public relations.

Low					Average					High
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

3. Shows experience in budgeting and fiscal management.

Low					Average					High
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

4. Shows experience in promoting curriculum development.

Low					Average					High
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

5. Shows evidence of leadership and organizational skills to maximize human potential.

Low				Average						High
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

* 6. Shows evidence of being a sensible, open, dependable person with strong community orientation.

Low				Average						High
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

* 7. Rating of the Statement of Accomplishment.

Low				Average						High
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

8. Variety and breadth of experience.

Low				Average						High
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Category B

1. Brings the diverse ideas and philosophies of those who work with him together in a meaningful fashion.

Low				Average						High
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

* 2. Previous administrative experience in district(s) with a variety of teaching methods and innovations.

Low				Average						High
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

3. Shows evidence of negotiations experience.

Low				Average						High
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Category B

1. General over-all appearance of materials presented.

Low				Average						High
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

2. Active participant in educational affairs outside the district.

Low				Average						High
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

3. Shows previous successful experience in levy and bond issue promotions.

Low				Average						High
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

4. Shows evidence of continued education beyond the Masters degree.

Low				Average						High
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

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